Flatterfly

Clara Louise Burnham

Her father wanted her to move slowly about and be dignified.

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By Clara Louise Burnham

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BOSTON AND NEW YORK

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By Clara Louise Burnham

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
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I

The Princess goes Skating

Flutterfly

I

The Princess goes Skating

NCE upon a time there reigned in the North Country a king. He lived in a beautiful palace; he had a great deal of money, splendid horses, and coaches shining with gold, and one would have thought he would have been a very happy king; but he was n't. It seemed as if the icy breath of the cold, cold winters they

had there had crept in around his heart and made it unloving. Was it any wonder that he looked sorry all the time, and that when he gave an order for anybody to come before him, that somebody (whoever he was) did n't want to go, but went very much against his will, and felt very uncomfortable until the king had stopped speaking to him in that loud, rough voice that frightened everybody?

You see the king did n't know that Love is the greatest power, and nobody in his court knew it, and so they were all sorry together.

The Princess goes Skating

But this king was proud, and the thing that he was proudest of was the princess, his daughter. She was a very young girl and liked to frolic and play, but her father wanted her to wear rich, heavy robes, stiff with gold, and to move slowly about and be dignified.

The little princess had no mother, but she had many teachers who made her study lessons, and in all the lessons there was nothing about loving other people, and nobody ever spoke about such a thing to her. Her name had so many syllables in it, it would have made a long tail to a kite if it

had been written out; so the pages, who liked her very much because she had such a bright, gay nature, called her Flutterfly, and it was so convenient to say, that many people called her by that name when the king, her father, was not present.

Flutterfly often did things that displeased her father. He wanted her to remember that she was the princess of a great and rich country, and that some day she would wear a queen's crown, but Flutterfly only remembered that she was a little girl who liked to play and frolic, and who

wished she was one of the pages in her father's palace.

She liked the clothes of these boys so much better than her own heavy robes! She liked the short crops of hair under their jaunty caps so much better than the flowing golden locks which it took her lady-in-waiting so long, every day, to brush and curl.

One morning there came to her a tempting thought. For awhile she tried to put it aside, because she knew it would be wrong to yield; but—oh, to think of what that little Flutterfly did at last!

A grave, dignified courtier saw her first from the palace window, and he thought he might be mistaken; so he went out of doors and down to the shore of the frozen lake, to look more closely. It was indeed true. Flutterfly was there. Her cheeks were like roses, her eyes were like stars, but the old courtier had no love in his heart. He had thought, for a long time, that Flutterfly ought to be shut up and fed on bread and water until she learned how a princess should behave. So he walked straight back to the palace, and, seeking the king, bowed low.

"Sire," he said, "I have a great sorrow for your majesty, but your heart is brave and wise. You will know how to meet this calamity."

The king frowned. "My daughter!" he exclaimed.

The courtier bowed. "Her highness, the princess, your majesty," he replied, and his eyes sparkled, because he was very unloving, and he knew Flutterfly was going to meet trouble.

He escorted the anxious father to the shore of the lake, and what do you suppose the king saw there? He saw the princess skating with the pages.

She had cut off her long hair, and it was curling under a jaunty cap. She had put on the costume of a page, and as the king approached, he saw that she was playing some game with the boys, and shouting gayly.

His face grew very hard and he held up his hand so that Flutterfly suddenly caught sight of his flashing robes.

She paused, stock still. He beckoned. She started slowly toward him, and the expression of his face made her look sorry, too.

He pointed at her silver skates.

She stooped down, sadly, and unfastened them. With a gesture the king forbade her to take them with her. She turned toward the pages, who stood huddled together in a frightened group.

"Good-by, little brothers, good-by, good-by," she said; and they answered, faintly: —

"We wish you might stay with us, dear Flutterfly."

Still the king did not speak. He glared upon the princess and pointed toward the palace. She trudged up the hill, not once looking back, but she

heard her father's heavy tread crunching the snow behind her.

When they had passed within, she paused, and her eyes were downcast, for she knew she had not done right, and that is a knowledge which takes away a person's courage.

"Go up to the northwest chamber and stay until I send for you," the king said, in a dreadful voice. "I am going to search through my kingdom for a woman with an iron will, who will take charge of you and whom you will not dare to disobey."

II

In Freezeland

II

In Freezeland

FLUTTERFLY did not like at all to go to the northwest chamber, for it was never used. It was empty and grim, and oh, so cold! But she climbed the marble staircase slowly, and her feet dragged reluctantly down the long, long corridors, that became chillier and chillier as she approached the unfrequented portion of the massive old palace. At last she paused, with a shudder, before a door;

then, with a quick movement, opened it and passed into the northwest chamber.

It was a lofty apartment, hung with pale green satin, and one's breath sent a vapor beneath its arches. There were two immense windows in the room, one north and one west, but whatever the view might be from them could not be told, for the frost had gathered and gathered upon them until nothing was to be seen but engravings in snow and ice a half-inch in depth.

"Jack Frost lives here, I do be-

lieve," thought Flutterfly as she entered, "and he will nip my nose until it matches my cherry-velvet mantle."

Then, catching sight of her own reflection in a long mirror, the light-headed little princess danced and pirouetted before the glass, laughing meanwhile at her own strange appearance.

The moon had risen, and its cold light illumined one of the fantastic frost-windows and made it look weirdly beautiful. Flutterfly seated herself in a deep arm-chair before it, and absently examined its wealth of

frost-feathers and foliage, pillars, and turrets, as she meditated upon different means of escape. It was a very unpleasant idea of her father's, to seek out an unkind guardian for her.

"Dear me," thought Flutterfly, "in every fairy story I ever read, there was a brave prince to rescue an unhappy princess. If I could get out of this palace without being seen, I would go and search for him. I believe as soon as it grows dark enough I will go."

No sooner had the princess determined on her course than the window at which she was gazing began to look

strange to her, and perhaps it was owing to the relief of being more settled in her mind, but certain it is that she began not to mind the cold, and to feel quite dreamy and comfortable.

She threw back her cloak, her eyes still fixed on the window, that looked stranger and stranger in the pale moonlight. It was a very large window, with but one pane of glass; and slowly the snow-field in the centre seemed to stretch away and grow long, while the beautiful frost-trees lengthened and grew until they shaded Flutterfly's head, and away in

the distance stretched the snow-field, sparkling like a million diamonds in the strange light which was over all.

Involuntarily Flutterfly rose from her seat, and when she looked about her the chair was gone, the lonely green room with the polished floor was gone, and behind the princess closed the white forest. Look where she would, all was glittering whiteness.

"The crust will bear!" she exclaimed, running and sliding over the broad field. "If I only had my skates now, how fast I could go to find my

prince! — Oh! excuse me," she cried suddenly, as she narrowly escaped knocking over a small individual who suddenly appeared before her.

He was of her own height, clothed completely in white, and wearing a high, peaked cap. His long, white beard sparkled with frost, and his face was so red that Flutterfly feared she had slid upon his toes and offended him, for his shoes were of ice and she might easily have done so without knowing it.

"Did I hurt you?" she asked, politely.

"Not at all," returned the little man; "and I would quite as lief you had the skates as any one else."

Then, only, Flutterfly noticed that a pair of skates, brilliant and handsome as her own, hung over his arm.

"Are those for me?" she asked, joyfully. "Who are you?"

"I am one of the Christmas workmen. I have charge of the skates and sleds, and I cannot refuse a wish expressed in my hearing."

"Then the skates belong to your master, and not to you," said Flutterfly, doubtfully.

A pair of skates hung over his arm

"Yes, but you are in Freezeland now," returned the other, with a smile which showed that he, at least, considered that this fact made everything quite right.

The princess demurred no longer, but put on the skates, saying: —

"Why do *you* not wear them, too? It saves so much time."

"Mine are better," said the man, "see how I go." And Flutterfly watched him skate away on his flat ice shoes, ducking at each stroke, and swinging his arms, and she laughed merrily at his queer figure; but it

was fast growing indistinct, and she recalled him, remembering her errand.

The man turned and slid back to her. "Well, little boy, what is it?"

Flutterfly reddened, but thought she would not undeceive him.

"I wish to find a prince," she said, simply.

"I know of only one," replied the little man.

"And where is he?"

"At the palace, of course, child. Go a hundred miles ahead and two to the left."

And the man skated off, and Flutterfly soon saw his form blend with the landscape.

Left alone in the stillness, the princess was glad to start off at the top of her speed. It was the poetry of skating. No fear of tripping over anything; the snow-field was absolutely smooth. On she went,—now forward, now backward, leaning far over on the outer edge of her skates, and varying her motions in a hundred graceful ways.

"A hundred miles ahead before I may turn to the left," she thought;

"and when I do turn to the left what will they say to me at the palace?"

At last, however, she began to grow weary, and was glad to see something which looked like a hillock in the distance; but it was far away, and it was long before she came near enough to see that what she had taken for a hillock was in reality a grand forest of the same feathery skeleton trees which had surrounded her when she first stepped into the window. Flutterfly's spirits rose.

"Surely, if I climb one of these trees

I can see the palace," she thought; and hurrying to the foot of the largest and tallest she could find, the princess slipped off the skates, and climbed the tree by means of spiky icicles, which projected from its trunk. Gaining the top, she looked eagerly about her, and saw beyond the forest little groups of low, irregular houses of snow and ice, and among them, white men, like the one she had already met, moving back and forth.

The little princess clung to her stiff tree with one hand, and with the other shaded her eyes from the glare. Ah!

the tantalizing peculiarity of this frosty Freezeland! The more closely Flutterfly looked, the less she could see. Houses and men faded into and blended with the landscape before she could have one satisfactory sight of them. It was rather depressing, and the princess, sitting down upon a lofty branch, covered her face with her hands, the silver skates hanging forgotten about her neck.

Never did a princess long more heartily for a good cry, but tears will not flow in Freezeland.

"I wish, I wish I could go home!"

she cried, and immediately saw, facing her, a strange, white, animal head, with a queer mouth and languishing eyes that regarded her mildly.

III

Prince Diamond

III

Prince Diamond

WHO are you?" she asked, shrinking back. "Do please get down."

The mild eyes grew injured.

"Down? I am down," replied the creature. "You don't wish me to kneel to you, I presume!"

Then the girl saw that a frosty white giraffe had poked its head up into the tree to converse with her, and she determined to be more polite, for

it was such a relief to have some one to talk with.

"Oh, don't mix, will you?" she asked eagerly.

"I find it would have been much better had I not tried to mix in such society as yours." And the offended head commenced to descend.

"Oh, I don't *mean* that!" exclaimed Flutterfly, catching desperately at one of his ears; "I mean don't mix with the snow so that I can't see you, for I wish so much for some one to talk to."

"Let go my ear, then," grumbled the other.

So the princess obeyed, and up came the head again.

"You were so rude, I came near forgetting my message; the prince has sent for you."

"What! Does he know I am here?" exclaimed the girl, joyfully.

"Probably he does, having sent for you," returned her companion; and Flutterfly thought that in all the world nothing could look so amusing as a sarcastic giraffe; but she did not even smile, for fear the animal would be offended and mix.

"He has sent his favorite horse,

Neige, to bring you to the palace. He's an ugly creature. Such a short, stumpy neck,—the horse, I mean, not the prince, although *his* neck is nothing to boast of either; but Neige will carry you safely enough, I dare say. He is waiting at the foot of this tree now."

No sooner did the princess hear this than she jumped lightly upon the giraffe's head, and slid down the whole length of his neck, and off his back to the ground, where, sure enough, stood the most beautiful white horse with a sparkling, frosty tail and mane,

arched neck, and small, pointed ears.

She had leaped into the white and silver saddle, and galloped away before the giraffe had time to bring his head down to investigate, for, of course, in Freezeland giraffes have stiff necks. Flutterfly's spirits rose as she caressed the beautiful horse that carried her so swiftly. They passed out of the forest, upon the country-side, which bore no traces of the houses and people which the princess had seen, or imagined she saw. The horse's hoofs rang out upon the sparkling

field, which he traversed at a tremendous speed, but with a steady gait that beat this rhyme in his rider's ears: —

"Prince Diamond is waiting for Flutterfly;
She 'll reach his cold palace by-and-by.
She 'll cross the broad river on frosty down,
She 'll ride a league into Freezeland town,
She 'll feel the hand-clasp of the Crystal King,
He 'll give her his son and a diamond ring.
In his ice-cold palace she 'll reign and stay,
Her father 'll not see her for many a day;
Poor old King of North Country, say good-by,
For you 've seen the last of gay Flutterfly!"

The princess did not enjoy this rhyme entirely, especially the closing lines; but its rhythm was so in accord

with the beat of Neige's hoofs that she could not prevent its ringing in her ears with a strange attraction. At last the horse came to a standstill on the brink of a jagged precipice, at the foot of which lay a frozen river with small ice-boats moving about on its surface.

The princess knew that she could manage the descent, but what would poor Neige do? She dismounted and spoke to him gently, but even as she spoke she saw his outline dissolve into the dazzling snow, and again the lonely child longed for her old and

much-abused power of weeping when matters did not suit her. She scrambled down the steep decline, and moved to the riverside. Instantly one of the boats sailed up to her, and to her amazement she saw that it was a beautiful swan with uplifted, spotless wings.

"'She 'll cross the broad river on frosty down,'" repeated Flutterfly in delight; and seating herself between the snowy wings, she sailed across the windless river toward a number of trees on the opposite bank.

"Thank you, dear swan," she said,

She sailed across the windless river

leaping out upon the snow; and before she had time to grow bewildered as to what course to pursue, there stood Neige, as though he had never left her, all impatience to be off.

"I must try to stop being surprised at things," thought the princess, as she seated herself in the saddle with a sigh of relief; and away went horse and rider. But at last the face of the country had changed: the trees were more feathery and fantastic of foliage than ever, the snow-ground was rolling, and all about rose glittering mountains, and down their irregular sides

clear icy falls gleamed blue and cold. And there, nearer and nearer, appeared the palace of ice, whose minarets and arches looked strangely familiar to Flutterfly, and reminded her of the northwest chamber. In remembrance the green room did not seem cold and dismal; but she had other things to think of now: her search was at an end, and the Prince was close by.

Neige neighed as he neared the palace, and out of its frosty arch and down the steps came Prince Diamond himself to meet the princess.

He was well named, Flutterfly thought, for he was literally encrusted with diamonds, which shot out green and yellow sparks at every movement he made. Very gallantly he assisted her to dismount, and led her into the palace, where, on a high throne, sat King Crystal, his father.

As the king descended to welcome his guest, Flutterfly noticed a comical-looking individual standing at the right of the throne, regarding her with dancing eyes, while he grinned from ear to ear. He was dressed rather jauntily, wore a cap fringed with

icicles, and a girdle of icicles hung about his waist and rang like little bells when he moved.

Flutterfly gave the king her hand, and he and his son both made signs that she was welcome, but not a word did either of them say.

"I thank you for sending me your beautiful horse," said the princess, politely, addressing the prince.

To her astonishment he not only did not reply, but showed no sign of having heard her.

Now, too, the attendant by the king's throne burst into a hearty and

rude peal of laughter, which confirmed Flutterfly's suspicion that he was ridiculing her. She looked from the king to the prince, wondering if they would allow such conduct, but they seemed entirely unconscious that anything was wrong, and continued to smile upon her in an admiring way which the princess found very aggravating, under the circumstances.

The attendant approached her familiarly.

"There is no use at all in losing your temper," he said. "You ought to know that by this time. What good did it

do your father to lose his and shut you up in the green room? Did you not walk right out, with my assistance?" And the sprite chuckled again; and his laughter sounded like the creak of wagon-wheels rolling over the snow in midwinter.

"With your assistance?" asked Flutterfly, mystified at the little man's knowledge.

"What! You refuse to recognize me after I led you into the frozen window? What ingratitude!" he exclaimed, his icicle chains ringing a merry peal as he shook his head, keep-

ing his sparkling eyes on the young girl's face.

"Who are you? Tell me this instant. I am the Princess Flutterfly, and you must n't tease me," she said, with an imperious stamp of her foot.

"Oh, I must n't tease you!" repeated the sprite; then he took off his cap with mock respect, and Flutterfly noticed that the thumb and first finger of his right hand were brilliantly red. Pulling on the cap firmly once more, the little man continued: —

"I am Jack Frost."

Flutterfly started back.

"I arranged the window in the northwest chamber for your reception, and determined that you should come and live here, for our prince has no sister."

Feeling very helpless Flutterfly turned to the king and held out her hands.

"Oh, Sire, you will save me!" she cried. "My father's heart will be broken if I do not return to him. I have been a willful child, but I will be so different! Imagine, Sire, if you were separated from Diamond —"

Love sends a Helper

IV

Love sends a Helper

KING CRYSTAL smiled vacantly, as he shook the hands she extended. The poor little princess drew them away in despair.

"Not a particle of use, my dear," remarked Jack Frost, folding his arms in triumph, "both the king and prince are as deaf and dumb as ice."

"And you expect me to live here with them!" exclaimed Flutterfly, with a scornful glance at the bril-

liant Diamond, who still regarded her with simple good nature. "You are king here, you mischievous Jack Frost! You have led me away from my home!"

And the child sank down on a block of ice, and buried her face in her hands, while her desire to weep amounted to pain. She sat thus, thinking and regretting until she felt a touch on her arm. Looking up, she saw the prince, who urged her, in pantomime, to come and skate with him. Her impulse was to refuse, but one glance at the mischievous frost-sprite,

chuckling at her misery, determined her to take courage, and appear brave, hoping that something would enable her to outwit her persecutor yet; so she allowed the glittering prince to put on her skates, and joined him in his graceful evolutions. The king was evidently delighted with his adopted daughter, and after seeing her perform a particularly difficult feat, he advanced to the princess, nodding and smiling, and slipped a diamond ring of dazzling brilliancy upon her finger.

The princess had presence of mind to accept the gift gracefully, for Jack

Frost's sharp eyes were upon her; but she thought with a deeper pang of her home, and the pages; and made many a good resolution for the future, if she could only reach the North Country again.

For many a day Flutterfly remained at the ice-palace, seeing no way of escape. Of what use would it be for her to start forth on the boundless snow-deserts? She could never find her way across them to the green-satin room she so longed to reach. Once she mustered courage, and going smilingly to Jack Frost, pleaded with him: —

"Let me make one visit to my father, just one," she begged.

The frost-sprite did not answer immediately. He looked uneasy, and sidled along toward a block of ice standing near.

"I don't see how I can," he replied hesitatingly; but as he reached the ice-block he caught at something which lay upon it. It was his cap. As soon as he had fixed it upon his head his old, confident manner returned.

"Not on any account, my dear child," he continued, threatening to nip the princess with his red thumb

and finger. Laying the latter alongside his nose, he winked knowingly.

Flutterfly turned away, not at all disconsolate. She saw the power of the cap, and straightway resolved to gain possession of it. She had learned how to convey ideas to the prince, and begged him to get the cap for her, but in vain. Diamond, usually so willing to accede to her wishes, refused, and she was nearly discouraged, when at last her enemy gave her an advantage by his own carelessness.

It was at a time when he was busy reddening his thumb and finger on a

piece of rough ice, and the cap, which he had taken off, lay beside him. The prince and princess were skating together near by. Flutterfly's heart throbbed as she saw the cap, and, with a quick motion of her foot, she tripped her companion, who fell his full length on the ice.

Jack Frost sprang to Diamond's assistance, and Flutterfly seized the cap and flew to the door.

"Neige, dear horse, you will help me, of course!" she exclaimed, breathlessly.

In less time than it takes to tell

it, the snow-white animal appeared, and the princess on his back sped away, the icicle-cap ringing a joyous peal.

A crackling sound caused the young girl to turn her head. Jack Frost was pursuing her at a speed which it seemed impossible for the horse to excel. His face was terrible to see, and it set the little princess in a quiver of fright. She tightened her hold on the precious cap.

"Dear cap," she whispered, "show me the forest on my father's window-pane."

But though Neige galloped bravely through many a forest, soft-white or sparkling, no sign of home appeared.

Flutterfly again looked back. Yes, surely Jack Frost was gaining upon her, and, as he came, his red thumb and finger clutched at the air in a way that made the princess shiver and urge her horse forward.

"Why did the cap bring Neige to me, if it will grant nothing more?" she wondered. Then a sudden idea struck her: "I know. I asked before in rhyme!" and she exclaimed: —

"Dear icicle-cap, so merry and gay,
To the northwest window, show me the way."

And lo, before the princess and her horse, appeared an arch of feathery, icy trees, and as Neige galloped beneath it, Flutterfly looked back once more at her enemy, who lay prone upon the snow-crust. With a sudden impulse of pity she flung back the cap, and Neige stopped; she felt him sink beneath her, and found herself alone under the arch. Very gently the branches of the frost-trees closed behind her, and softly forced her for-

ward. A chilly air blew across her face, and the little princess was standing in the northwest chamber. A drop of water trickled down her hand. Her diamond ring had disappeared.

But what was Flutterfly's surprise to find this desolate room ablaze with light. Her father, the king, was sitting there, and near him a lady whose white robe shaded when she moved to blue and violet. But Flutterfly scarcely looked at her. Her joy in being safely within the walls of the palace again swallowed up all dread of what might be before her. She had

eyes only for her father, whose gaze was fixed sadly on the polished floor.

An instant later the princess was kneeling at his feet, kissing the king's hand which wore the great seal ring.

With an amazed, glad cry, the monarch started and took his child in his arms. She could not remember any such embrace in all her life, and as she clung to him she felt sure, for the first time, that he loved her; and suddenly it seemed very easy to be good.

She looked up brightly at the woman who had been sharing the king's vigil. Flutterfly remembered his

An instant later she was kneeling

threat, and supposed this must be the guardian for whom he had promised to search throughout his kingdom.

"Is this the angry lady?" she asked timidly; but even as the words passed her lips she met the stranger's sweet smile and knew that no angry lady could have eyes like that.

"My little child," said the king, tenderly, "you are a great princess and your return will rejoice a whole kingdom, but this lady serves a much greater king than I. She came to me in my trouble, and has taught me how to wait for you."

"Oh, your majesty," sighed the happy princess, scarcely able to believe the change in her father's voice, "I have been in Freezeland!"

"And I have been in Freezeland, too," he answered; "but Love has sent us a helper. I have learned many things in your absence."

"Oh, my father!" murmured Flutterfly, close to his breast. "I have been so lonely! How happy we shall be!"

And Love's messenger smiled upon them and all the great room grew warm.

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